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The state of the green: A review essay on Shakespearean ecocriticism

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This essay reviews the ecocritical approaches to Shakespeare that have emerged in recent years. The “green” school of criticism can tell us new things about Shakespeare and about our present predicaments, but must also be treated as an intellectual phenomenon with a distinct role and history within the professionalization of literary criticism in academia. Exploring the unavoidable ethical implications of this professionalization, the article concludes that ecocriticism is ineluctably presentist and requires academics to change the ways they think and work.

Keywords: title; green; ecology; environmentalism; presentism; ethics; Marxism; historicism; animal rights

As we approach the end of the first decade of this new millennium, the state of the Shakespearean green is muddy. In writing this essay, I cannot dry the green, leaving the grasses to grow; and it may be that the green will remain muddy, the result of rising seas or contentious literary critics. But I do hope to begin a conversation that will allow us to make it less muddy, and greener. And I can thump my chest just a bit, knowing I have constructed a metaphor that sums up well the principal question over which ecocritics struggle: does poetry, and by extension does writing about poetry, enhance the state of the green or contribute to the health of the planet? To begin this conversation, I will focus on method, tackling the issue of definition especially, which is a tricky proposition in literary study, where methods and definitions proliferate. Indeed, writes Dana Phillips, definitional laxity seems to be “essential to literary criticism”, a form of writing and analysis in which “wit still plays an important and somewhat nefarious role”, and which, therefore, “both tolerates and welcomes misreadings, invalid interpretations, incommensurable conclusions, and just-so stories” (73). Often we offer definitions on the spot, idiosyncratically, using a move known to us all that I call “the ‘what I shall call’ move”. In the preface to *The Shakespeare Trade: Performances and Appropriations*, for example, Barbara Hodgdon explains that she tries to map a certain cultural territory, “what I have chosen to call the Shakespeare trade” (xi). W.B. Worthen likewise informs us in the introduction to *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* that scholarly debates about the linguistic concept of performativity have “important consequences for an understanding of the work of scripted drama and its performance, what we might call ‘dramatic performativity’ – the relationship between the verbal text and the conventions (or, to use Butler’s term, ‘regimes’) of behavior that give it meaningful *force* as performed action” (3).

Most of us are like Hodgdon or Worthen, indulging “the ‘what I call’ move” occasionally, but others, like Richard Burt, adore the move. In *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares: Queer*

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Theory and American Kiddie Culture, Burt indulges the move twice in the preface and nine times more in the first chapter.¹ Burt's definitional creativity is dazzling or frustrating, depending on one's point-of-view, and "the 'what I call' move" is thus much like Phillips's wit, "an important and somewhat nefarious" part of literary criticism and methodology. The methodological implications of this move are not all bad, of course, since terminological innovation occurs all the time, in every field. Also true is that such innovation occurs in context or, more accurately, historically; arguably, knowing a term's genealogy is important. Thus when Burt suggests that "some (loser) critics may have the phallus or what Lieberman calls 'special stuff'" (21), or when Hodgdon refers to "what Clifford Geertz calls thick descriptions of . . . events" (xii), the reader of Burt or Hodgdon infers, reasonably enough, that Lieberman and Geertz originated these terms. But for Geertz this is not the case. After musing briefly on the origins of scientific terms, during which he discusses Suzanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, Geertz suggests in *The Interpretations of Cultures* that the important thing to know about a science is not theories or results but what practitioners do, and what they do in Anthropology, Geertz claims, "is an elaborate venture in, to borrow a term from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, 'thick description'" (7). Borrowing, needless to say, is not invention, and in instances such as this "the 'what I call' move" misleads. Furthermore, although we all would acknowledge, with Geertz, via Langer, "that certain ideas burst upon the intellectual landscape with a tremendous force" (3), it is also true that almost all ideas fizzle there.² Given the unlikelihood that one's terminological innovations will galvanize a generation of followers, circumspection about terminology might be in order. As Linda Charnes concludes after discussing the definitional knot associated with "periodicity", literary critics might profitably "rethink our investment in our own self-generated categories" (*Heirs* 24).

Similarly, we tend to resist terminology closest to hand. Consider the common phenomenon of using the work of Shakespeare, or of any author, in order to produce another piece of literature. This practice is commonly known as "adaptation", but others call it – or certain instances of it – "appropriation", still others the making of an "off-shoot", still others a "rewriting" and at least one a "collaboration". Even if one grants that each of these terms suggests a distinctive relationship to the source text, one may still wonder why that distinctive relationship cannot be described using the word, "adaptation".³ Or consider "ecocriticism", the subject of this essay. Here we have no established term; and multiple alternatives, all of which encompass the same critical activities, have been promoted in recent years, including "environmental criticism, literary-environmental studies, literary ecology, literary environmentalism, or green cultural studies" (Heise 506, following Buell *Future* 11–12). A principal reason for this proliferation, according to Lawrence Buell, is that the term ecocriticism "implies a . . . methodological holism", including a familiarity and ease with science, that simply does not exist (Buell *Future* 12).⁴

To define "ecocriticism", or an ecocritical method, therefore, may be beyond my powers, or any literary critic's, as indeed it may be beyond my powers to affix such a definition or method to Shakespeare studies (even given the generous number of pages allotted to this essay by *Shakespeare*).⁵ But certain key questions associated with such a task may be addressed fruitfully, as Shakespeareans and other early modernists go forward in the ecocritical endeavour.⁶ Partly this is because progress will be slow until Shakespeareans understand the difference between old-school "nature studies" and new-school "ecocriticism" of Shakespeare. Partly this is because ecocritical studies of Shakespeare are recent and increasingly numerous additions to what is itself a young field, one still growing rapidly and, indeed, contentiously. And partly this is because, as Karen Raber observes in a handsome review essay published in 2006 in *English Literary*

Renaissance, “early modern scholarship and ecocriticism . . . continue to pose challenges to one another”⁷ (168). One such question – and, I suppose, challenge – is that of science, just mentioned and to which I shall return, the seriousness of which should not be underestimated since, as Phillips argues, among ecocritics

the infamous gaps between the arts and the sciences . . . are apt to be papered over rhetorically. All too often, little or no effort is made to confront these gaps directly and to bridge them argumentatively, where that is possible (sometimes, of course, the gaps are simply unbridgeable, and the disciplines may have little, if anything, to say to one another). The inevitable result is that [with respect to the science] basic errors of fact and interpretation, especially of the latter, are perpetuated under the banner of interdisciplinarity. (44)

More broadly at issue in our debate about science is “constructionism” and how discourse relates to the “real”. Another question is the quality or kind of engagement with nature, including non-human species, evident in a given literary or cultural work. And still another is that of the critic’s or the argument’s political activism in or even just concern for the world today.

The latter issue, in particular, strongly affects Shakespeare studies and early modern studies more generally, because of our recent and continuing methodological debate about the hegemony of historicism and archival work in the field. A lot of hedging goes on in this debate, and a lot remains confusing in it. David Scott Kastan, for example, thinks that discovering Shakespeare’s value must “at least begin with the recognition of his difference from us” because that recognition prevents “the premature imposition of present day interests and values. (The important word here is, of course, ‘premature’; some such imposition is inevitable and indeed desirable.)” (16, 17). Perhaps the important word is premature, but others may disagree. Terence Hawkes suggests that what Kastan and others deride is not the attempt to “deal with plays in blissful ignorance of their historical context” – a straw man certainly – but the attempt to deal with the plays theoretically: the historicists claim that “theory’s stress on the critic’s ‘situatedness’ in the present results in a self-regarding focus that irrevocably contaminates any contact with the past” (1, 2). Hugh Grady casts the opposition differently, not history versus theory, but history versus politics: the change in our terminology from “the new historicism” to “historicism” encapsulates the way scholars have moved from “cultural insurgency to cultural conformity, from an understanding of literary studies as politically engaged to one that attempts to normalize and academicize its practices” (113). Diana Henderson invokes both oppositions by blending them: in the current moment “many feel compelled to choose either the archive or theory, either the veneration of historical detail or the claim for present significance” (33). Henderson calls this a “loss” (33) and I tend to agree, but not entirely. Such a choice could be the result of a healthy division of intellectual labour. In other words, when Hawkes says, “of course we should read Shakespeare historically” (3), I am happy to agree and happier still that historians, historical sociologists, and many literary critics are labouring in ways uncongenial to me. (Though I do wonder, sometimes, about the rigor of literary critics’ training in historical methodology and about the effect on our discipline of writing about the non- or sub-literary.)

I think the loss Henderson identifies is less the result of choosing either the archive or theory (or politics) than the result of *feeling compelled to do so*. Perhaps we should begin to ask ourselves why, as Jane Gallop relates, graduate students and assistant professors, perhaps especially in the earlier historical periods, increasingly believe it is “impossible to get published without archival work” and hence of course impossible to obtain a tenure-track position without it (181). Such hegemony in method is unhealthy and, as Gallop says,

“misguided” (181), especially, one might add, since much of this debate, at least among early modernists, seems a matter of degree or emphasis.⁸ Historicists engage their craft theoretically, or they should; and presentists engage with facts, both with respect to the early modern period and their own, or they should; and theory is not necessarily politics, nor politics necessarily theoretical, in any case. Nevertheless, Raber is not alone, it is safe to say, in worrying about a distorting effect on “early modern scholarship” from ecocritical political engagement: “our own green politics can tend either to erase inconvenient aspects of past ecological thought or to view that past with an overly critical and dismissive eye” (168). Furthermore, she is right to worry, since, I will argue here, presentism is, if you will, especially presentist in its ecocritical form. The importance of talking about a definition of ecocriticism may be put this way and starkly: is it (Shakespearean) ecocriticism if it is not presentist, politically engaged in and with the world we inhabit now?

The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE, pronounced AZ-lee) defines its mission broadly as “the exchange of ideas and information about literature and other cultural representations that consider human relationships with the natural world”. Meaning to be as inclusive as possible, the organization acknowledges as within its members’ purview “any text that illuminates the ways humans perceive and interact with the nonhuman environment” (<<http://www.asle.umn.edu/index.html>>). Such breadth is both commendable and no doubt was necessary for an organization seeking academic legitimacy in 1992, especially one whose members included environmental activists and creative writers as well as literary critics and which had roots in “an association of second-level prestige [the Western American Literature Association] whose principal support base lay mostly outside the most prominent American university literature departments” (Buell *Future* 7). Many of these literary critics, perhaps most, prided themselves on their rebellious “disaffection with business-as-usual literary studies” and, writes Buell, were deeply suspicious of the theoretical developments in literary study that, in the previous two decades, had separated

reader from text and text from world. . . . These ecocritical dissenters sought to reconnect the work of (environmental) writing and criticism with environmental experience – meaning in particular the *natural* world. I recall an intense exchange at the first international conference of the then still-new ASLE in Fort Collins, Colorado, over the questions of whether nature writing could be properly taught without some sort of outdoor *practicum* component, preferably *in situ*. Environmental literacy was seen as indispensable to such a pedagogy. (Buell *Future* 28, 6)

More than a decade old, Buell’s recollection implies that such an intense exchange would not occur today. Such practical literacy is no longer indispensable, or even desirable, and, in the current moment, perhaps it is simply risible. Today, ecocriticism is no longer *déclassé* in literary studies: ecocriticism’s practitioners nest – even if sometimes singly – in elite PhD programmes, and no one need claim strong ties to activists and creative writers. Or if one does, the activists and creative writers may be more interested in environmental justice than in maintaining the pristine condition of the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve. Although many ecocritics still think that “ecocriticism needs what it calls ‘theory’ like it needs a hole in the head” (Morton 10), major academic publishers think otherwise: in 2003 Oxford University Press published Phillips’s *The Truth of Ecology*, which strongly contests ecocriticism’s aversion to theory, and, in 2007, Harvard University Press published Morton’s avowedly theoretical *Ecology without Nature*.

Following by a decade or so historian William Cronon’s pathbreaking essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”, Morton’s book offers

both “an ecocritical theory” and “a theoretical reflection upon ecocriticism”, one that “criticize[s] the ecocritic” (8–9). For the trouble with ecocriticism, like the trouble with wilderness, is that, as Morton suggests, it “is too enmeshed in the ideology that churns out stereotypical ideas of nature to be of any use” (13). Our problems lie with concepts like “nature” and “wilderness”, which, as Morton quips, “set people’s hearts beating and stop the thinking process” (7). Contending that the ecocritical canon is already fixed, focused far too closely on Romanticism and nature writing, Morton wants to open up ecocriticism, open it to theoretical inspection but also to different and proliferating texts, from “pastoral kitsch to urban chic, from Thoreau to Sonic Youth” (5). Taking a cue from feminists, if not from Gabriel Egan, Morton protests, “Even if a Shakespeare sonnet does not appear explicitly to be ‘about’ gender, nowadays we still want to ask what it might have to do with gender. The time has come when we ask of any text, ‘What does this say about the environment?’” (5).⁹ Of course, one might protest that Morton constructs a straw man, since, as Morton knows, a sizable amount of literary criticism and history does ask this very question about many, many texts, Shakespearean and otherwise. Well documented is the history of nature and even the history of “nature”, the concept that worries Morton so. Some of this work is compiled in Raber’s review essay, now to be found on the ASLE website and to which I direct all readers of this essay, even as I address a small portion of this work here, too. But just reading Keith Thomas’s enormously useful *Man and the Natural World* gives one a very good sense of how nature developed from what was, as Morton puts it, “practically a synonym for evil in the Middle Ages . . . [to be] the basis of social good by the Romantic period” (15).

Without question, the decision to advance an open definition of ecocriticism enabled the field’s rapid growth. Raber’s review of “Recent Ecocritical Studies of English Renaissance Literature” could not have been written (or posted on ASLE’s website) under a more narrow definition, one that mandated a respect for science or a commitment to contemporary political action, because many of the works surveyed in her review have no connection to the present moment – for example, Jeanne Addison Roberts’s *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender* (1991), John Gillies’s *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (1994), Linda Woodbridge’s *The Scythe of Saturn: Shakespeare and Magical Thinking* (1994), Edward Berry’s *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social History* (2001), or Mark A. McDonald’s *Shakespeare’s King Lear with The Tempest: The Discovery of Nature and the Recovery of Classical Natural Right* (2004). Other early modernists or Shakespeareans nod to the present moment in a preface, on page two, or in an appendix before sinking exclusively into the attempt to recover the early modern.

Nods can be revealing about the state of the green, however. Consider that of editors Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., in their introduction to *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, a book published in 2007 and thus not included in Raber’s survey. Their nod results from having included in the volume an essay by Julian Yates (“Humanist Habitats”), who writes theoretically sophisticated essays that engage both the early modern and the present, and whose work might establish what it means to be an early modern ecocritic, if not a Shakespearean one.¹⁰ Describing Yates’s essay as an “ecological criticism that refuses to privilege the figure of the human in a network of cohabiting things and beings”, the editors deem it necessary to explain, presumably for their historicist readers, what connection Yates’s work has to the “emergent field” of “early modern ecocriticism”. This connection is an unnamed set of “ethical goals” to be found, apparently, in a short list of books and articles by Robert N. Watson, Gabriel Egan, Lorraine Sylvia Bowerbank and Simon Estok (11, 13 n. 32). What this nod reveals, I think,

is not that the editors were sloppy or hurried in putting together their collection, but a bit nervous about addressing the presentist unknown that is early modern ecocriticism: Egan and Estok are avowedly presentist in their approaches; and Watson, as we shall see below, tried very hard to be.

A less anxious nod is Rebecca Bushnell's, in her *Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern English Gardens* (2003). This book is included in Raber's survey but is not about Shakespeare, and so, by rights, I should not be talking about it here. But Bushnell finds a way to hook historicism to ecocriticism, having distilled her reading in the field to a discussion of several key figures in five pages on the topic. "Even a little reading of this body of work", she concludes, "immediately reveals how difficult it is to write about nature and culture. Any discussion of this topic must submit to the paradox that, even if you think that culture constructs nature, 'there can be nothing that is not "nature" – it has no opposite'" (2, citing Neil Everden 20). This argument, familiar to Shakespeareans and early modernists from *The Winter's Tale*, is one Bushnell rejects in order to lean towards social construction and the historically contingent, which allows her to cast *Green Desire* not as ecocriticism but as a related examination of "a local argument about nature and culture that took place in English gardening manuals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (5). This local and historical argument, however, will appeal, she hopes, not only to professional early modernists but also those "interested in gardening itself", for although the "manuals and authors . . . are odd . . . we can indeed see something of ourselves in these men and women and their green desires" (11).

This way of hooking historicism to the present, by seeing something of ourselves in the past, is familiar to Shakespeareans and early modernists after three decades of theory-inflected and, Hugh Grady (and Kastan) would argue, presentist analysis by new historicists and cultural materialists, feminists, post-colonialists and queers. Seeing ourselves in the past is part of what Erica Fudge, in her *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (2000), calls Stephen Greenblatt's "metaphorical representation of the new historicist project" (1): the desire to speak with the dead is necessarily mediated through the present. As Greenblatt suggests: if "I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my own voice" (20).¹¹ Not surprising, therefore, is to find such a goal, a bit of presentism, in the work of Shakespeareans and early modernists who think their historicist work may be judged by ecocritics. Fudge thus offers in the final paragraph of her *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (2006) the hope that her research will allow us "to think again about those vital beings, animals, and the significant and productive roles they have played in our past, play in our present, and will continue to play in our futures". And, she hopes, her research will allow us to reassess "not only . . . the early modern period itself but also our own" (192). In 2002, Bruce Boehrer concluded *Shakespeare Among the Animals: Nature and Society in the Drama of Early Modern England* by noting that the focus of his historical research "has left its mark on contemporary social and political life; animals continue today to be used not simply for material purposes, but also for the ongoing project of defining the human" (169). Like Fudge, he offers his readers hope about our relationships to animals. Referring to the dog, Crab, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Boehrer identifies both "bad news" and "good news" in the dog's representation on stage: if "we can't reach Crab from where we are, locked in a sociolinguistic order that takes alienation and role-playing as its fundamental constants", we do "inhabit a world in which we may put ourselves in another's place, however imperfectly; that in doing so we may learn, however imperfectly, to mend our imperfections; and that through this process, however imperfectly, we may learn how to love" (167, 168).

Although sceptical about the political efficacy of ecocritical writing, Boehrer nevertheless acknowledges that “the ecocritical project”, this emergent “politically alert criticism . . . will inevitably, and rightly, inform critical responses” to *Shakespeare Among the Animals* (181). A statement like this is difficult to contest, since “inform” is rather vague, but I would suggest that its accuracy depends on how broadly one defines the ecocritical project and just how significantly animal studies as a field is part of or intersects with ecocriticism. And this decision is significant for our purposes here, since, as the reader may have already inferred, animal studies constitute a large portion of what Raber categorizes as ecocritical studies of English Renaissance literature; indeed, animal studies receive the most space in Raber’s review, aside from those focusing on Shakespeare. Yet, a number of writers suggest the two fields are only awkwardly related. Jonathan Bate believes that arguments about animal liberation “belong in the province of ethics” and the poet’s distinctive contribution to this discussion is to “engage *imaginatively* with the non-human” (199). But Greg Garrard, sketching the issues within that province, asserts flatly that animal studies scholarship is not “strictly a branch of [ecocriticism since] environmentalism and animal liberation conflict in both theory and practice”, with lines of contention drawn especially over where to focus our moral interest: animal studies advocates insist (usually) on sentience and thus on individual species, while environmentalists insist on a broader view that includes rocks, streams, forests, and the like (139–40). Rebecca Raglon and Marian Scholtmeijer agree about this incompatibility, adding that as a result of privileging “the consequences of human-animal interactions” over “a ‘big picture’” of the environment, animal studies readings differ from environmentalists’ readings by making emotional appeals far more frequently (123–24) and, more importantly, by casting humans as fearsome creatures, “as destroyers, either of animals directly, or of animal habitats” rather than as beings potentially able to “exist in harmony with nature, [even if] the terms of that harmonious relationship are difficult to pin down” (125).

Regardless of possibilities for overlap – and even Garrard thinks animal studies scholars can be allies of ecocritics (140), because of course some animal studies scholars think in terms of larger environmental concerns, even as some ecocritics think specifically about species – these two perspectives do conflict, especially and often dramatically over policy. Hunting obviously is a bone of contention, particularly when delicate environments are involved, but, as Raglon and Scholtmeijer point out, so too is bio-engineering, with its potential to cure human diseases (138 n. 3). Buell concludes that the

most intensely debated of all the issues surrounding [animal liberation] has been the more general question of the relative claims of an anthropocentric or humankind-first ethics versus a nonanthropocentric or ecosystem-first ethics of whatever kind. What values to assign to the welfare of endangered people as against the welfare of endangered nonhumans and/or bioregions? Shrinking elephant herds versus famine-threatened villagers? Loggers versus spotted owls, rainforest diversity versus urban public health? (*Writing* 227)

If – and this in contrast to ecocritics who, as Raglon and Scholtmeijer point out, tend to be anthropocentric – animal studies scholars are ecocentric or non-anthropocentric in philosophical orientation, one might wonder about the convenience of historicism for early modernists engaged in animal studies. Is historicist bracketing a means to avoid the messy world of theory and practice described above, the realm, in fact, of the presentist scholar? Is historicist bracketing a means to avoid association with, say, the philosophical program of Deep Ecology, or with the politics of groups like Earth First! which draw on the intellectual resources and status of Deep Ecology to further radical ends? Arguably, a professor at a major research university in the US or the UK might wish to avoid the latter

association in particular, for if, as Earth First! maintains, the earth does come first, then logic dictates that “an individual human life is not the most important thing in the world” and in certain circumstances may have less value than, say, an individual grizzly or polar bear (Foreman, cited by Luke 42). As political scientist Timothy Luke points out, Earth First! believes that if drought in Africa, for example, causes famine among human populations, with unfortunate consequences, “the destruction of other species, wilderness, and natural habitats is . . . even more unfortunate”. Not articulated in the programme of Earth First!, then, is the logical endpoint to which such statements point: “if humans are *the* problem, then killing most of them would be *the* solution” (Luke 42).

Misanthropy notwithstanding, diversity is lessening in nature, but much diversity exists in that “ecological project” described by Boehrer. And the diversity in the discussion above is but a sampling of the diversity to be found in a group like ASLE, whose rapid growth has been propelled by contributions from political positions more varied than that of Earth First! and a number of academic disciplines ranging from anthropology to philosophy, economics to earth sciences, biology to literary and art criticism, anthropology to philosophy, and history to evolutionary psychology. The field is now so complex that book-length introductions have appeared, such as Greg Garrard’s *Ecocriticism* (2004) and Buell’s *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005). Such complexity has not – and this in contrast to ASLE’s official claims – prevented a consensus from developing about the nature of the field. Ursula K. Heise thinks, and I would judge this to be the majority view, that the field involves a “triple allegiance” to “the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world” (506). I would like to comment upon each of these allegiances, beginning with Heise’s invocation of science as crucial to ecocriticism, a topic I briefly touched upon above. As many have noted, myself included, one of the reasons for ecocriticism’s slow development in literature departments is that literary critics in general have actively resisted the suggestion, made periodically throughout the short history of ecocriticism, that they must respect the methods and findings of science, even if this is a task that is, as we shall see, easier said than done. An early – some call it the first – book of ecocriticism, Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*, published in 1972 and including a chapter on *Hamlet*, contains both a strong defence of an inter-disciplinarity that encompasses science and a definition of ecocriticism that requires scientific understanding rather than scepticism. Some 20 years later, Karl Kroeber argued that if we were “willing to think beyond self-imposed political and metaphysical limits of contemporary critical discourse”, we could use the revolutionary advances in biological science to create a literary criticism able to “contribute to the practical resolution of social and political conflicts that rend our society” (1). But our scepticism about science is not easily reversible, and has a distinguished history, one that long antedates the science wars of the 1990s, or the (foundational) linguistic turn of the late 1970s and 1980s. We have long tended to see science “as a metaphysical monolith” (Kroeber 35) and have long tended to blame science for modern ills rather than see it as a force to be managed and directed towards beneficial ends. (In this our response to science echoes our response to capitalism.)

Nevertheless, calls for ecocritics to “develop their own ‘ecological literacy’ as far as possible” (5) are becoming more numerous and repetitive, with this one by Garrard in 2004 followed by Heise’s call in 2005 for a literacy that would “minimally require some training in quantitative methods” (510), and by Egan’s call in 2006 for Shakespearians to “consider [Elizabethan] commonplaces in the light of new science and philosophy” (*Green Shakespeare* 32). More strident, and depressing, is Phillips’s 2003 attack on ecocritics’ tendency to be “overly credulous” about ecology, relying for their information primarily on

the field's populizers in the various environmental movements (42). As a science, rather than a political position, ecology "today is far from being the sort of recuperative, affirmative, and utopian science that ecocritics have assumed it to be" (143) and has thoroughly broken with its early assertions about nature's "balance, harmony, unity, and economy" (42). These assertions, and to them we might add "organicism" or "wholeness", are widely embraced by ecocritics – they are "deeply ingrained", judges Garrard (178) – but the application of evolutionary theory and chaos theory to ecology in the late twentieth century has rendered them "more or less unscientific, and hence as 'utopian' in the pejorative sense of the term" (Phillips 42).¹² Contingency and indeterminacy have become the field's watchwords, calling into question long-standing assumptions of ecocriticism, as well as of mainstream environmentalism more generally.

Phillips, Garrard and Heise each see this challenge of inter-disciplinarity as crucial in any fruitful development of ecocriticism. But "developments in ecology that expose the rhetoric of balance and harmony as, in effect, versions of pastoral" (Garrard 178) or that suggest the necessity for ecocritics to obtain training in quantitative methods only raise the stakes of the challenge, make it more difficult for literary critics to gain the expertise necessary to adjudicate, interpret or critique the science; and, therefore, even more importantly, to adjudicate, interpret, or critique the literary texts that are, after all, the foundation, the focus, of ecocritical analysis and method. In fact, as Heise usefully points out, a critique of ecocriticism such as Phillips's, which "lambasts environmental scholars for adhering to an obsolete notion of ecological science and for transferring ecological terms to literary study by means of mere metaphor", does not in the end offer a positive alternative for "the scholarly analysis of cultural representations" (520). One might say the same about Morton's argument as well, but in doing so, one should acknowledge that critique of the methodological status quo, not to mention critique of those who critique the status quo, is much easier than developing a better mousetrap – and a lot more fun. I would suggest, however, that progress here will occur when ecocritics take seriously, and try to answer, questions that Morton and Phillips usefully raise, which concern the relevance of literature to ecology and thus anticipate the question that is, as I suggested at the outset of this essay, the most pressing for ecocritics: does poetry, and by extension does writing about poetry, enhance the state of the green or contribute to the health of the planet? Speaking specifically of the Romantic tradition, Morton wonders "whether the aesthetic is something we should shun, in the name of generating a liberating ecological artistic practice, or whether it is an inevitable fact of life that reappears in ever-subtler guises just as we think we have given it the slip" (25). And Phillips asks: "What is the truth of ecology, insofar as this truth is addressed by literature and art? . . . How well – how ably, how sensibly, how thoroughly – do literature and art address this truth?" (39)

Despite the politicization of literary study and of the literary since the 1960s, I think it safe to say we seldom question the virtue of literature, or even of specific literary genres; we question specific writers, specific works and especially the way writers and works were used and have been used to maintain regimes of privilege. Our aim has been that of reformation – of making literature work better, of making literary institutions work better within societies. And this is not surprising, for we not only are invested, professionally, in the virtue of literature but also love literature, love words, love the imagination. One critic who has questioned literature's value, however, is Meeker. Meeker defined ecocriticism, what he called "literary ecology", as "the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species" (9).¹³ For Meeker, those roles might be good or bad, strong or weak, and tragedy, Meeker argues, results from "some of the same

philosophical ideas” that have encouraged our “disastrous misuse of the world’s resources” (59). The tragic sense of life is unnatural, and Hamlet, finding himself on the cusp of the modern, straddling comedy and tragedy, shows “how impossible it is to be at the same time both a good man according to the criteria of tragedy, and a good human animal according to the requirements of nature” (78).

Few ecocritics have followed Meeker in questioning, shall we say, the ecological goodness of literature, of more precisely, certain literary forms. More common is the approach of Bate, who offers a definition of “literary ecocriticism” similar to Meeker’s: the ecocritic’s goal is to define the “place of creative imagining and writing in the complex set of relationships between humankind and environment, between mind and world, between thinking, being and dwelling” (73).¹⁴ And that place, for Bate, as for the Romantic writers he especially loves, is “very central”, for “art is the place of exile where we grieve for our lost home upon the earth” (73). Bate hypothesizes in his book’s closing sentence that “if mortals dwell in that they save the earth and if poetry is the original admission of dwelling, then poetry is the place where we save the earth” (283). Perhaps; and certainly this is a compelling place to be, this place where we save the earth. And yet one wonders about the work required of this short word “if”, which so often, it seems, takes us where we want to go. As Touchstone tells Jaques and Duke, Senior in *As You Like It*, there is “much virtue in If” (5.4.102). “If is the only peacemaker” because “if” is hypothetical, conditional, not real. Pushing the real, stretching it, “if” soothes dissonance between perceived realities and thus reduces the need for confrontation, such as, say, between duelling aristocrats or, in a different register, between our love for art and our desire to save the earth. As Bate acknowledges (and so do almost all other ecocritics), demonstrable damage has been done to the earth by poets and other artists: “you create culture by enslaving nature” (92).

Before I try at the conclusion of this essay to make some peace, if not sworn brothers, among duelling ecocritics of the early modern period, it is necessary to explore the argument a bit further, to point out that all of the issues discussed so far arise prominently and brightly in two works about our period and our author,¹⁵ each published in 2006: Robert N. Watson’s *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance*, and Gabriel Egan’s *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism*. These books will shape debate about ecocritical Shakespeare for years to come, partly because of the strength of each, partly because the one differs significantly from the other, and partly because the sub-field of practitioners remains small. It is no accident that in *The Review of English Studies*, Egan reviews Watson and Watson reviews Egan (although it may be an accident that the reviews appear consecutively in the same issue of the journal). Indeed, anyone looking to find a demonstration of what is at issue in this essay might do well to read pages 817–22 in volume 57 of *The Review*, where materialism collides with idealism, political action with intellectual history, a “charming polymath” (the words are Watson’s [“Review” 820]) with a Serious Scholar (the words are mine), and an introductory handbook to “a recent theory or emergent methodology”¹⁶ (Watson, again [“Review” 819]) with a scholar’s third book-length visitation to an intellectual problem characterizing the Renaissance.

Controlling for the egos involved here, one may discern in each review an attempt to shape the development of ecocritical Shakespeare. Egan begins his review of *Back to Nature* by throwing down a gauntlet: admitting that “like literature itself, ecocriticism is a topic often approached from an interest in something else”, Egan urges that it is, nevertheless, “hard to agree with Robert Watson that ‘our struggles with ecology are, in an important sense, an extension of struggles with epistemology’” (“Review” 817). He chastises Watson for pursuing the reach of epistemological uncertainty to its “expression”

in late Renaissance literature and painting. Rather, Egan suggests, Watson should rebut the artists' longing for an unmediated experience of nature "with hard truths of historical materialism", thus following the lead and updating the work of Raymond Williams ("Review" 817). As anyone vested in the larger ecocritical world would surely do, Egan points to Watson's acknowledgment – which he describes as a "confession" – made towards the end of *Back to Nature*, that "I set out here to write a piece of ecocriticism; at least, to use scholarship to use literature to assess what in our cultures makes us at once so sentimental toward nature and so careless of it. Much against my conscious will, I found the project drifting into more philosophical questions . . ." (*Nature* 335). Egan judges this drift a "flaw" and thus articulates the principal oppositions I noted above, between materialism and idealism and between political action and intellectual history, suggesting that Watson, like Jonathan Bate, imprudently follows Martin Heidegger in thinking "ecological concern . . . a branch of epistemology". Whereas, Egan insists, the "more genuinely ecocritical (and scientific and philosophical) approach" requires the framework of the political, "something as unfashionable as a progressive march of ideas" ("Review" 819). And for that march, epistemological questioning – or certainty – is not necessarily relevant: "A life-long 'Green' need never look up 'epistemology' in a dictionary . . ." ("Review" 817).

Two points are compelling here, I think. First, Egan uses the review to push, from start to finish, his quarrel with idealism, a quarrel that in *Green Shakespeare* is a quarrel with Jonathan Bate (*Green* 38–44). Second, in describing Watson's "confession" that his intention to write eco-criticism failed as the project slipped into philosophy, Egan misses an opportunity to enlist Watson in his own cause. For Watson himself suggests a distinction between "ecocriticism" and these "more philosophical questions", which difference we may infer by noting Watson's hope that a "few ideas" emerging from his immersion in epistemology "may do service to [his] original intention" (*Nature* 335). In particular, he observes, the history of our treatment of animals implies that the "incidental and accidental result of local innovations [might] end up making new uses of a fundamentally conservative collective legacy" (*Nature* 335). More generally, he concludes that

commentary on literature allows us . . . to learn from the immense wisdom of the ancients and to pass judgment on the areas where their sensibility seems to us still unenlightened (undeveloped and hence unjust), using that combination of praise and censure to try to improve our own culture. . . . [in particular by] struggling to reconcile love for human mastery with love for the natural world thereby enslaved. (*Nature* 336)

That history is contingent; that the local may fruitfully disrupt the hegemony of the larger social order; that we can both learn from and censure the intellectual efforts of our predecessors – all of these are happy thoughts (though one might be tempted to say, with Horatio, that "there needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave/To tell us this" [1.5.131–32]). Less happy is Watson's central argument that "the human hold on the world tends to destroy its intricate and essential beauty"; that, as he argues about *As You Like It*, one must be "wry and dubious about the prospects for any authentic involvement with the natural world" (*Nature* 336, 4). But all lead to accomplishing his goal, which is to help readers understand "how some people [in the past] came to care, in politically and intellectually responsible ways, about present and future life on this planet as a collectivity" and thus perhaps to expand both "the ecologically minded community and its wisdom" as well as, "in however small and gradual a way, the niche in which life makes its beauties and finds its joys" (*Nature* 5).

What defeated Watson's attempt to write ecocriticism, then, is his coming to awareness of the intractability of the problem. Newly wry and dubious, Watson realized that we can but struggle "to reconcile love for human mastery with love for the natural world thereby enslaved" (*Nature* 336). As a result of this intractability, our efforts as scholars can result – "perhaps" – in "small and gradual" improvement of the environment. By implication, then, ecocriticism in Watson's view requires not a weak politics but a strong politics, an activist politics, which is precisely the politics he rejects and the politics he implicitly chastises Egan for pursuing. I say "implicitly" because, in his review, Watson does not mention Egan's overt green politics, which celebrates a "growing coalition . . . that unites socialists and anarchists with environmentalists, anti-capitalists, their cousins the anti-globalizationalists, and animal rights activists" and which, in addition, forms the basis for Egan's book: "ecopolitical insights can inform critical readings of Shakespeare" (*Green* 3, 16). Instead, Watson subtly attacks the sin of presentism that characterizes ecocriticism and Egan's own work by impugning his scholarship. Presentists, as by now we all know, are not scholars; those who once were called new historicists and cultural materialists "don't really know any history, they've just picked up bit and bobs from Natalie Zemon Davis and Christopher Hill". They don't know how to get "properly into the historical actuality" (*Sinfield* 4). As Alan Sinfield points out, the consensus today has been the consensus for quite some time, more than a decade, and insists that "we would do better history, and better politics, through a more localized kind of historical study, attending more closely to 'the sorts of issues which characterized political discussion' in the period, rather than importing modern constructs" (1, quoting Andrew Hadfield).

For indeed, Egan's *Green Shakespeare* is not in Watson's view a work of scholarship at all but introductory handbook, a "highly energetic" but thin work ("only 181 pages of notes and text") that lacks "any sustained assertive thesis", and "feels scattered" as it "rambles through Shakespearean drama", offering "overcrowded . . . condensed [or] whimsical" accounts of environmentalism and the background science ("Review" 819, 820). Watson does judge Egan to be "a critic with a sharp mind", and concludes that "there is finally a method in these madcap forays . . . [in] all this frenetic activity and acrobatic stretching of the ecocritical category". For what emerges is "a refreshing and valuable argument. . . . [that] Shakespeare is 'already Green' (p. 4) or, at least, greenable"¹⁷ ("Review" 822) and thus the work is, Watson thinks, a "welcome addition to the current scholarly conversation" ("Review" 822). But even when praising Egan, Watson manages to damn him: what is welcome about Egan's intervention in the scholarly debate is that, despite his presentist assumptions, including his "strong Marxist credentials", Egan comes to surprising – dare we say, un-presentist? – conclusions: he "finds ways to praise Shakespeare rather than bury him in historical oppressions". Similarly, "in resisting the assumption that invocations of nature are always politically regressive, Egan ends up convincingly resisting a wide range of presentist and progressivist tendencies, in science as well as literature" ("Review" 820, 822), tendencies that are, we must assume, unfortunate. A Marxist and a presentist he may be, but Egan is one who – surprise! – "recuperates the old-fashioned and arguably regressive Shakespearean patterning – orderly correspondences across scales of magnitude – as an intuition of nature's wonders rather than a naturalising endorsement of existing social power-relations". Egan, it turns out, isn't a grumpy Marxist, smoking in a corner in the pub, but a jolly fellow at the dart-board, knocking back shots of Jack Daniels with his ale; he is convivial and, while *Green Shakespeare* "may be a meadow scattered with wildflowers, rather than a garden, . . . it is finally a rewarding place to visit" ("Review" 822).

Could a critic – could I – ask for a more delicious metaphor? In it, we find not only the distinctions Watson pushes throughout his review, between the undisciplined critic and the disciplined scholar, and between blowsy presentist criticism and hard-nosed historical scholarship but also the political insistence Egan pushes throughout his. For “wildflowers” and “garden” bring instantly to mind the hotly debated question among ecocritics and environmentalists, already alluded to above in our discussion of animal studies, of whether ’tis nobler in the mind and in the policy to be ecocentric¹⁸ or anthropocentric, which is to say, whether ’tis nobler to favour “deep” or “shallow” ecology, “radical” or “mainstream” environmentalism, the spotted owl or the poisoned working class in our cities and rural areas. It would be tidy for me if the ecopolitics of Egan and Watson actually lined up with wildflowers and gardens, or even if Watson intended to imply such – for instance, that Egan moonlights, away from the dartboard, as an eco-terrorist in the American west, blowing up ski resorts – but, alas, I do not think they do and I do not think he did. Further, as I have already implied, and as numerous ecocritics urge, including Cronon, Morton, Buell and Phillips, among many others I have not mentioned here, the opposition between wilderness and garden, between nature and culture, is spurious and unhelpful, both philosophically and politically.

The fact is that despite their many differences, and despite nods towards ecocentrism, such as in their discussions of animal studies, Egan and Watson are both in the garden, whether the one on Church Street in Stratford-upon-Avon or the one on Oxford Road in San Marino, California. In these gardens, in the garden, they find Bate wandering around, too. And me, too. All of us are anthropocentric at bottom, because all of us approach the natural through the mediation of words, naturally enough, and all hold faith in the potential of literature and literary study to effect ecological change, even if modestly. Watson’s entire project rests on mediation’s ability to assuage scepticism, leading to philosophic pragmatism and, ultimately, some form of action: “Shakespeare and Hooker are both seeking to bridge the same conceptual division, trying to insist that one can surrender the goal of an absolute legible or tangible truth without falling into radical subjectivity or nihilistic despair” (*Green* 292). Thus, as Shakespeare works through this problem, the linguistic analogies and “partial resemblances” that *As You Like It* “warns are untruths, serve in *The Merchant of Venice* as the only truths people have” (*Green* 290). Such truths, Watson claims, are “useful ones, too” (*Green* 290), since

it seems important, especially for environmentalist advocacy, to assert that words have consequences in the material world; that our connection with the environment is essential even if philosophically elusive; that, whatever the extent of our entrapment in the prison-house of language, we cannot abjure our responsibilities in the killing-fields of nature; and that (for example) calling animals “venison” (as in *As You Like It*, 2.1) means something very different, consequentially so, from calling them “deer” or not presuming to know their identity. (*Green* 47–48)

The prison-house of language does not “mean human beings are entirely unconnected to the natural world, or exempt from obligation to life . . . that actually exists in beseeching particulars” (*Green* 48).

Beseeching particulars make demands upon us, however, and ecocritics fail to respond to those demands when they embrace business-as-usual literary studies; when they rest in gardens built by the wealthy; when they fail to acknowledge the complexities in the present moment of, say, animal liberation; and when they do not address questions posed by Morton and Phillips about the relevance of literature to ecology, about the extent to which poetry, and by extension writing about poetry, enhances the state of the green or

contributes to the health of the planet. Meeting the demands of beseeching particulars would seem to require the framework of the political and thus position us closer to Egan than to Watson (or Bate): the “genuinely ecocritical (and scientific and philosophical) approach” requires the framework of the political, of “a progressive march of ideas” (Egan “Review” 819). My worry, however, is that a march of ideas does not quite do the job. As Phillips observes somewhat caustically, nothing is wrong with writers and readers doing what writers and readers do, sitting in rooms, these days usually attached to computers, as they read and write. But it is also true that “devoting our time and energy to the perusal of environmental literature [much less the production of criticism about such literature] would seem to be a roundabout way for us to secure a bond with the earth: it’s as if we should spend our time poring over the personal ads, instead of striking up a conversation with the lonely heart next door” (15, 7). It may be, therefore, that what we need is not just a progressive march of ideas but an actual march; as I have argued elsewhere, we need to change the ways we live and the ways we do business. We need to behave differently.

Perhaps detecting the relevance of literature to ecology begins here: most of our literary engagements with nature are faulty from a contemporary ecological perspective because, as Garrard points out, they do not suggest ways to behave differently. “Pastoral and wilderness tropes typically imply the perspective of the aesthetic tourist, while [that of] the apocalypse encodes the vision of a prophetic imagination” (Garrard 108). As a result, a number of critics, including Garrard, Bate and Morton, suggest that we attend to models of living established in the undervalued “literature of farming known as ‘georgic’” (Garrard 108). Easy to see, however, is that the models georgic provides cannot be adopted on a scale large enough to effect the kinds of change in behaviour that ecocritics and environmentalists deem necessary to heal the planet. Not even a plurality of us can be Wendell Berry or even the average, carbon-fuel-based family farmer. For this reason, I find compelling the way Timothy Sweet discusses pastoral and georgic by eschewing the traditional distinction between herding and farming, and offering instead a distinction based on the “modal orientation [of each] to the world: leisure versus labor”.¹⁹ Making this shift allows us to see that today most of us “experience nature primarily in the pastoral mode, regarding nature (if it is regarded at all) as a site of leisure, not of labor” (175). One implication is that we need again to see nature as a site of labour and ourselves as “co-workers with nature”, who might “use the georgic tradition’s insights to evaluate current attempts to redirect our environmental engagements” (175).

A focus on labour rather than farming might also allow us to bring georgic into the twenty-first century, out of the country and into landscapes that are predominately urban, and thus to offer models of living that might effect change in behaviour on a scale large enough to affect positively the health of the planet. Indeed, taking Sweet’s insight further, we might say that we also need, once again, to regard civilization as a site of labour. The traditional opposition between “nature” and “civilization” notwithstanding, it surely is the case that our culture (perhaps especially our urban culture) is one “that has as its highest aim the avoidance of anything remotely resembling physical work . . .” (Keizer 11). And surely, too, as Garret Keizer argues, if the current climate crisis suggests anything, it is that such a culture “must change its life” (11). But how to do so? Usually, we try to think ourselves out of this problem; as Morton argues, “we have a mind . . . that . . . fantasizes about nature in its struggle to think itself out of the history it has created” (203). Morton thinks the solution is “a shutting-down of choice” and suggests that this is “the ideal moment for us to slow down . . . and *not* act” (28). But not acting cannot be all we do. As or more important than not acting is learning to act differently, more slowly, without so

much, such extensive, reliance on carbon-fuelled machines, using instead that “abundant, renewable fuel source whose chief emission is human sweat” (Keizer 11).

Earlier, I mentioned that in their introduction to *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, editors Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., explain the connection of Yates’s work to the “emergent field” of “early modern ecocriticism”. This connection, I pointed out, is an unnamed set of “ethical goals”. My intention in this essay has been to try to sketch the territory in which they might be named. To begin, I tried to describe, if not define, what ecocriticism is and does, what its commitments are; and then I tried to apply that description and those commitments to what we have been doing in Shakespeare studies and early modern studies more generally, particularly historicism and animal studies. I both acknowledged and supported the dodgy nature of definition and, indeed, of method, in literary studies, but nonetheless urged that in this instance a consensus about the field of ecocriticism has arisen, which, as Heise explains, requires a “triple allegiance” to “the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world”, with the latter commitment, especially, holding the field together: “ecocriticism coheres more by virtue of a common political project than on the basis of shared theoretical and methodological assumptions” (506). Ecocriticism is a presentist criticism that finds interdisciplinary focus in the sciences, which means that most of the work in our field that claims to be, or would like to be, ecocriticism is not. At least three responses to this situation are possible. We could settle our methodological debate surrounding the relative merits of historicism and presentism in ways that allow more critical space for the latter. This option would allow Shakespearean ecocriticism to develop, for the green to become less muddy and the grasses to grow. Presentists would feel less beleaguered. Historicists would feel encouraged (if not compelled) to engage ecocritical theory and practice. Having done so, having gone beyond a nod to the present, historicists might use their work, as Sweet suggests, “to evaluate current attempts to redirect our environmental engagements” (175). A second option is that historicist Shakespearians simply stop trying to jump on the ecocritical bandwagon, while continuing to do what they do, historicist business-as-usual directed towards the early modern natural world. A third option is one I offered recently, which offers an activist goal for ecocritics and historicist critics alike. Focused on the profession, such activism would promote sustainability or even a reduction of our size and influence in society as a whole. Offering “Slow Shakespeare” to counter the ways we do Shakespeare now, we can consume less (jet fuel, electricity, paper and so on) and read and write – and teach – more. By changing the ways we live now, both professionally and personally, we can counter the “the aggressive speed of modern technological existence [that] is destroying the planet as we knew it” (Morton 165).²⁰ Curing the ecological crisis, the ecological catastrophe, “involves reaching down into ourselves and pulling out a new kind of person” (Kingsolver 345). And that, I suggest, is or should be a principal ethical and political goal of ecocriticism and of a Green Shakespeare.

Notes

1. In the preface, one finds “the castrated subject-position of what I call ‘kiddie culture’” (xxix) and “the focus of this book is on what I call ‘post-hermeneutic’ ShaXXXpeares” (xxx). In the first chapter, one finds “Youth culture has been redefined as what I call ‘kiddie culture’” (9); “much of what I am calling ‘unspeakable ShaXXXpeares’ is . . .” (12); “and what I call ‘loser criticism’” (13); “what queer theorists call ‘heteronormativity’” (13); “some (loser) critics may have the phallus or what Lieberman calls ‘special stuff’” (21); “I focus on what I call ‘eruptions’ of gay sexuality in straight, mallhouse films . . .” (24); “in relation to what I call a castrated male

- gaze” (25); “the context of what I call ‘the transvestite voice’” (26); and “the possibility that the unspokenness or what I here call spectralization of ShaXXXspeare replays . . .” (27).
2. On the difficulties of intellectual diffusion, see Randall Collins: “the structure of the intellectual world allows only a limited number of positions to receive much attention”, with the result that “the intellectual world of long-term fame is much more sharply stratified than the economic-political structure of societies, even in those periods when ruling aristocracies were less than 5 percent of the populace” (75, 76). See also 37–46, 519–22.
 3. In contrast to Burt, Linda Charnes uses familiar concepts and tells her readers just how she means to use them. In *Hamlet's Heirs: Shakespeare and the Politics of a New Millennium*, Charnes suggests that it is useful for her purposes to distinguish between legacy and inheritance. She then explains exactly what she means by each term (7–8). Similarly, in *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*, Charnes offers several pages of methodological commentary, positioning herself with respect to the principal theoretical schools she invokes, making it clear to her readers where she stands on questions such as the relationship of subjects to social structure. At the same time, Charnes knows well the limits of methodological rigor in literary criticism: “the extent to which my approach is successful – by which I mean persuasive and evocative rather than prescriptively reiterable – will be achieved by interpretive accretion rather than by programmatic formula” (*Notorious* 14).
 4. Despite this, Buell thinks the term “may well be here to stay” (12).
 5. Charnes, too, admits that “I lack the ability to settle the current debate about methods” (*Heirs* 15).
 6. And go forward they will, despite my advice to the contrary (“Slow”).
 7. These are that “the recovery of texts is a first step toward recreating Renaissance ideas about nature, but some dimension of the material environment is always resistant to reconstruction; the languages with which early modern readers approach the natural world and its inhabitants do not always translate well; and [as I will note in the body of the paper below] our own green politics can tend either to erase inconvenient aspects of past ecological thought or to view that past with an overly critical and dismissive eye” (168).
 8. To this day, I am surprised that Kastan’s *Shakespeare After Theory* has become a rallying point for historicism since, for example, the argument in “Is There a Class in This (Shakespearean) Text” rejects a “precise” definition of social class to argue for the not “quite accurate” thesis that the theatre and acting companies “brought class into view” even if they did not bring it into “being” (150, 162). Even as one wonders how one can “view” class if it does not exist, one also imagines that historicism requires precise definitions and eschews anachronism, a typically presentist move. See also Note 11.
 9. Egan anticipates Morton, arguing similarly that Shakespeare’s “plays cannot answer our questions about how to prevent ecological disaster, any more than 30 years ago could they answer feminists’ questions about how to fight sexism and undermine patriarchy. But, then as now, the plays are useful (and indeed infinitely pleasing) as interrogations of our ideas about our relations to one another and to the world around us. As such they help us think clearly about what is at stake in those relations” (*Green Shakespeare* 4). See my “Slow Shakespeare” for an interrogation of this analogy focused particularly on the problem of effectiveness. After 30 years of feminist Shakespeare criticism, patriarchy remains a potent force in society. Do we have 30 years to “prevent ecological disaster”? Should our ecological efforts be more effective?
 10. See Yates’s essays “Counting Sheep: Dolly does Utopia (again)” and “Humanist Habitats: Or, ‘Eating Well’ with Thomas More’s *Utopia*”.
 11. Fudge’s admission that “despite my misgivings about new historicism”, Greenblatt’s statement “can still be used to sum up an important element of the historical endeavour” (1) suggests, too, that differences between “historicists” and “presentists” may (or can) be a matter of emphasis or degree. Contra Grady and Kastan, one might argue that most new historicism was not presentist enough, displaying far too much genuflection before Foucauldian notions about the relationship of art to power and not enough inquiry into different or competing social theory, not to mention compelling, fact-based assessments of high culture’s position in Western culture, then or now.
 12. On this point, see also Wooster (388–443), Sweet (175–76) and Heise (520).
 13. Phillips criticizes Meeker’s conclusions about literary form but praises him for attempting to tackle the issue. Meeker’s analysis is “an example of the very thing ecocriticism has been spurning . . . and needs to take . . . fully into account, which means that it cannot rest in an assertion of the formal perfection and congruity with nature of the literature it most admires”

- (Phillips 147, 152). Phillips is less sanguine about Meeker's attempt to assess the value of literature for human ecology, insisting that aesthetics and morality are distinct discourses and that "ecocritics need to recognize that cultural and natural processes are functionally distinct or at least distant from each other, and that maintaining the distinction, and keeping the distance, is probably a good idea" (149).
14. And very similar to Kroeber's definition: "Ecological literary criticism concentrates on linkages between natural and cultural processes. It thus functions transmissively. Instead of withdrawing the objects of its study into a hermetic discourse, it seeks to enhance widespread appreciation of how literary art may connect cultural experiences to natural facts" (1).
 15. Watson's book is partly about our author.
 16. In light of my concern here with definition, Watson's characterization of what Egan is doing in *Green Shakespeare* prompts the following questions: what are we talking about in talking about ecocritical Shakespeare? A theory? A method? Is a theory a method? A method a theory? What does it mean that a leading scholar of the early modern period cannot describe Egan's work definitively as either one or the other, either recent theory or emergent methodology?
 17. I find this formulation a problem: "already green" suggests a historicist position; "greenable" suggests a presentist one.
 18. Or biocentric or geocentric. These terms are often used interchangeably.
 19. Sweet reads Virgil this way, too. In the *Eclogues*, Virgil "understands the natural world primarily as a site of leisure, in the *Georgics* he understands it primarily as a site of labor. . . . While this distinction has become blurred since Virgil's time, I will suggest that it is worth reanimating. I will note . . . that I am less attached to the particular term georgic than to the set of concerns I am using the term to indicate" (2).
 20. Morton asserts that "the contemporary 'slow movement' . . . is a contemplative approach that is ultimately aesthetic rather than ethical or political" (165). I disagree. Slowing down is – or can be – both ethical and political. Using that "abundant, renewable fuel source whose chief emission is human sweat" is ethical and political. Slowing down is not always about "appreciating life" or engaging in contemplation; slowing down is about labour and work, engaging the world without or with less of the mediation of carbon-fuelled machines.

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